

# THE GREAT QUESTION

CONCERNING  
THINGS INDIFFERENT

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## Religious VVorship,

Briefly stated ; and tendred to the Consideration of all Sober and Impartial men.

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*Chillingworth Præf. §. 34.*

*Not Protestants for rejecting, but the Church of Rome for imposing upon the Faith of Christians, Doctrines unwritten and unnecessary, and for disturbing the Churches Peace, and dividing Unity in such matters, is in an High degree presumptuous and Schismatical.*

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L O N D O N,  
Printed in the Year, 1660.

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# The Publisher of this Treatise

## TO THE Christian and Candid READER.

**T**Hough Opinions should be weighed; not by the Reputation of the Authors which deliver, but by the strength of the Arguments which defend them; yet it is too usual with unobserving Readers, to slight the Argument for the Author's sake; and to consider, not so much what is said, as, who it is that says it. Which being the common Fate of most Discourses, such especially as do at all meddle with that excellent, but too much abused Notion of Christian Liberty, do most expose the Writers to Censure: The most obvious Character that is fastned upon them being, that they are Men either of Loose, or else of Faction's Principles: And so being discredited, before they are read; their books, how sober soever, do not remove, but only settle and fix the Preconceived Prejudice; as in diseased stomachs, every thing they take turns to nourish and to increase the Humor.

That this is like to be the Fortune of this small Treatise, I have reason to expect; and therefore I have suffered it to run abroad into the world without a Name, like one of those *Αυτογεννητα* *Σπείον*, Pliny mentions, as if it were Born of it self, and begotten without a Parent. That so those few Readers it may meet with, may only fasten upon the Faults of the Discourse it self, without diverting themselves unto that Question, which all Times, as well as Sauls, (2 Sam. 10. 12.) have malice enough to make a Proverb of, But who is their Father? Yet Christian Reader, that it may appear only with its own Faults, and have no aggravating Suspicions upon it, from any mistake of the Author's Designe or Humour, I have adventured to give thee this Account of Him.

First, That He is a strict Assertour of the Doctrine of the Church of England, as it is contained in the 39. Articles; and for that which is the Prime Branch of Discipline, viz. Episcopacy, or the Subordination between Bishops and Presbyters; he doth own it to be of Apostolical Institution; that is, as he understands it, *Jure Divino*. At least



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*he thinks himself able to speak as much for the Order of Bishops in the Church, as any can for the Baptizing of Infants, for the Change of the Sabbath, or for any thing else, which hath no particular Divine Precept, but only Primitive Practice and Example to warrant it. And therefore in Conformity to this Principle of His, when the Bishops were sunk lowest, not only for Pomp, but likewise for Reputation; and when no temptation either of Profit or Convenience, but rather the contrary, could work upon him; He then chose to be ordained a Presbyter by one of them: which is a greater Argument of his Reality and Stedfastness in Judgment, then most of those, who now signalize themselves by Distinctive Habits, can pretend to; since such may reasonably be presumed to wear them, either because they are the Fashion, or else the way to Preferment.*

*Secondly, This I must say likewise, that none is more satisfied with the Present Government, or hath a more Loyall and Affectionate Esteem for his Majesties Person and Prudence, then this Writer: and therefore instead of declaiming against, or too rigid re-enforcing our Old Rites, fitted only for the Infancy of the Church (these being as it were its swaddling-clouts, and at the best do but show its Minority) he doth heartily wish that all Parties would agree to referre the whole Cause of Ceremonies to his Majesties single Decision: from whose unwearied endeavours in Procuring first, and afterwards in Passing so full an Amnesty of all our Civill Discords; we need not doubt but we may obtaine, that these Apples of Ecclesiastical Contention may be removed out of the way. Which are so very Trifles, that they would vanish of themselves, but that some mens Pride, others want of Merit make them so solicitous to continue them; least if those little Things were once taken away, they should want something whereby to make themselves Remarkable.*

*Lastly, He doth profess yet further, that as to himself he needs not that Liberty, which here he pleads for: since, though for the Present he doth make use of that Indulgence, which his Majesty hath been pleased to allow unto Tender Consciences, i. To all Rationall and Sober Christians: (the continuance of which, he dares not so much wrong his Majesties Goodness, as once to question) yet should his Majesty be prevailed upon for some Reason of State, to enjoyne Outward Conformity; this Wri-*

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ter is resolved, by the Help of God, either to submit with *Chearfulness*, or else to suffer in silence. For as there is an *Active Disobedience*, viz. to Resist, which is a Practice he abhorres; so there is a *Passive Disobedience*, and that is to Repine, which he can by no means Approve off. Since whatever He cannot Conscienciously do, he thinks himself obliged to suffer for, with as much Joy, and with as little Reluctance, as if any other Act of Obedience was called for from him.

Having said this concerning the Author, I need not speak much concerning the Argument; but only this, that it was not written out of Vanity or Ostentation of Wit; but as a Question, in which he is really unsatisfied; and therefore thought himself bound to impart his Doubts, which having done to many in Discourse with little success or satisfaction; he hath now Communicated them to the World, hoping they may light into such mens hands, who may be prevailed upon, if not to alter the Judgement, yet at least to moderate the Passion of some, who would put out our Eyes, because we cannot see with their Spectacles; and who have placed Ceremonies about Religion, a little too truly as a Fence, for they serve to keep out all others from their Communion. All therefore which this Treatise aims at, is briefly to prove this, --- That none is to Hedge up the Way to Heaven; or by scattering Thorns and Punctilioes in it, to make Christianity more Cumberfome, Tedious and Difficult, then Christ hath left it. That is in short, That none can Impose, what our Saviour in his Infinite Wisedome did not think Necessary, and therefore left Free.

Farewell.





# THE G R E A T Q U E S T I O N

Concerning

*Things Indifferent in Religious VVorship,*

Briefly

Stated and tendred to the Consideration of all  
sober and Impartiall men.

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Quest. Whether the Civill Magistrate may lawfully impose and determine the Use of Indifferent things, in reference to Religious Worship.

**F**Or the understanding and righter stating of this Question, I will suppose these two things;

1. That a *Christian* may be a *Magistrate*; this I know many do deny, grounding themselves upon that Discourse of our Saviour to his Disciples, *Ye know, saith he, that the Princes of the Gentiles do exercise Dominion over them, and they that are great, exercise Authority upon them. But it shall not be so amongst you*: from whence they inferre, that all who will be Christs Disciples, are thereby forbid any exercise of Temporall Sovereignty. And I remember amongst many other of the Primitive Writers, who were of the same opinion, *Tertullian* in his *Apology* doth expressly say, *Nos ad emnem Ambitionis auram frigemus*, &c. We i. *Christians*, sayes he, have not the least Taint of Ambition, being so farre from affecting Honours, that we look not after so much as the *Edileship*, which was the lowest Magistracy in Rome; and afterwards of *Tiberius*, *Tiberius*, sayes he, would have become a *Christian*, if either the world did not need, or it were lawfull for *Christians* to be Emperours. Many other expressions there are both in *Tertullian*, *Cyprian*, and *Origen*, to the same purpose. But

Mat. 20.  
25.

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because

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because the Practice of the Christian world, down from *Constantines* time, even in the most *Reformed Churches*, hath carried it in the Affirmative for Christian Magistracy; and the contrary Doctrine, besides the Gap it opens to all Civill Confusion, is built only upon some remote Consequences from Scripture, rather than any direct proof. I will therefore admit that a Christian may lawfully exercise the Highest place of Magistracy, *only*, as the Apostle saith in another case, *in the Lord*, i. not extending his Commission farther then the Word of God doth warrant him.

2. I will suppose that there are some things in their own Nature *Indifferent*, I mean, those Outward Circumstances of our Actions, which the Law of God hath left Free and Arbitrary, giving us only generall Precepts for the Use of them either way: Such are, *Do all things to the glory of God*, And, *Do what makes most for edification*, and the like, which Rules whoever observes, may in things Indifferent, either do or forbear them, as he in his Christian Prudence shall think Convenient.

Of these Indifferent things some are Purely so, as the *Time* and *Place* of meeting for Religious Worship; which seem to me, to be so very Indifferent, that they cannot without great violence, be wrested to any superstitious Observance; and therefore concerning these I do not dispute.

Other things there are commonly supposed Indifferent in their own Nature, but by Abuse have become occasions of Superstition; such as are, *Bowing at the name of Jesus*, the *Cross* in *Baptisme*, *Pictures in Churches*, *Surplices in Preaching*, *Kneeling at the Sacrament*, *set Formes of Prayer*, and the like; All which seem to some Indifferent in their own Nature, and by any, who is perswaded in his Conscience of the Lawfulness of them, without doubt may lawfully enough be practised; yet I hold it utterly unlawfull for any Christian Magistrate to impose the use of them. And that for these Reasons.

First, Because it is directly contrary to the Nature of Christian Religion in generall, which in every part of it is to be Free and Unforced; for since the Christian Magistrate cannot, as I think now all Protestant Writers do agree, force his Religion upon any, but is to leave even those poore Creatures the *Jews* and *Mahomedans*, to their unbelief (though they certainly perish in it) rather than by Fines and Imprisonments to torture them out of it; then much less



less may he abridge his Fellow Christian, in things of lesser Moment, and which concerne not the substance of his Religion, from using that Liberty in serving God, which his Conscience prompts him to, and the Nature of his Religion doth warrant him in; For God as he loves a *cheerfull giver*, so likewise a *cheerfull Worshipper*, accepting of no more, then we willingly performe.

Secondly, And more particularly. This imposing of things Indifferent, is directly contrary to *Gospel-Precept*. Our Saviour doth in many places Enveigh against the Rigid and Imposing *Pharisees*, Mat. 23. for laying *yoakes* upon others, and therefore invites all to come unto him for *Freedome*, *Take my yoake upon you*, saith he, *for it is easie, and my burden is light.* And, *If the Sonne set you Free, then are you Free indeed.* Where by *Freedome* I do not only understand *Freedome* from sin, but from all *Humane Impositions*; since the Apostle *Paul* doth seem to allude unto this place, in that Command of his to the *Galatians*, *Stand fast in the Liberty, where-with Christ hath made you Free, and, be not again entangled with the Yoake of Bondage*; where, that I may prevent an Objection, I will grant, that by *Yoake of Bondage*, he understands *Circumcision* and other *Jewish Ceremonies*; but from thence I will draw an unanswerable Argument against the urging of any other now upon a Christian Account; since that the *Mosaicall Ceremonies* which had so much to plead for themselves, upon the Account of their Divine Originall; and which, even after they were fulfilled by our Saviour, still remained indifferent in their Use, and were so practised by *Paul*; yet when once they were Imposed, and a Necessity pleaded for their Continuance, the Apostle Writes so sharply against them, exhorting the *Galatians* to *stand fast in their Liberty*, as part of our Saviours purchase. If this, I say, was the case with those *Old Rites*, then much less can any now impose an invented *Forme of Worship*, for which there cannot be pretended the least warrant that ever God did Authorize it. And it seems altogether needless, that the *Jewish Ceremonies*, should, as to their Necessity at least, expire and be abrogated, if others might succeed in their roome, and be as strictly commanded, as ever the former were: For this only returns us to our *Bondage* again, which is so much the more intolerable, in that our Religion is stiled the *Perfect Law of Liberty*: which *Liberty* I understand not wherein it consists; if in things *Necessary*, we are already determined by God,

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and in things *Indifferent* we may still be tied up to *Humane Ordinances*, and *Outside Rites*, at the pleasure of our *Christian Magistrates*.

To these Scriptures which directly deny all Imposition, may be added all those Texts, which consequentially do it, such as are *Do to others, as you would have others do to you*: And who is there that would have his Conscience imposed upon? And, *You that are strong, bear with the Infirmitie of the weak*; Whereas this Practise will be so farre from easing the *Burden* of the *weak*; that if men are at all scrupulous, it only laies more load upon them. These Scriptures, with many hundreds the like, show that this kind of Rigour is utterly inconsistent with the Rules of Christian Forbearance and Charity, which no *Christian Magistrate* ought to think himselfe absolved from: Since though as a *Magistrate* he hath a Power in Civill things; yet as a *Christian*, he ought to have a care that in things of spiritual concernment he grieve not the minds of any, who are upon that Relation, not his Subjects, so much as his Brethren: and therefore since they have left their Naturall, and voluntarily parted with their *Civill*, they ought not to be entrenched upon in their *Spiritnall Freedom*: especially by such a *Magistrate*, who owning the same Principles of Religion with them, is thereby engaged to use his Power, only to support, and not to ensnare them: to Bound perhaps, but not to Abridge their Liberty; to keep it indeed from runing into Licentiousness (which is a Morall Evill) but not to Shackle, Undermine and Fetter it, under pretence of *Decency* and *Order*. Which when once it comes to be an *Order* of constraint, and not of consent, it is nothing else but in the Imposer, Tyranny; in the person Imposed upon, *Bondage*: and makes him to be, what in things appertaining to Religion we are forbidden to be, viz. *The servants of men*. Ye are bought, saith the Apostle, with a price, and manumitted by Christ, *be ye not the Servants of men*: which prohibition doth not forbid Civill Service, for he said a little before, *Art thou called while* Verse 21, *thou art a servant? care not for it; but if thou canst be free, use it rather*, Implying, that Civill Liberty is to be preferred before servitude, yet not to be much contended for, but held as a matter Indifferent; but when once our Masters, shall extend their Rule over the Conscience, then this precept holds valid, *be ye not the servants of men*.

Thirdly, It is contrary to *Christian practice*, of which



we have many remarkable Instances:

1. The first shall be that of our *Saviour Christ*, who was of a most sweet and complying disposition; he sayes of himself, that he came *Eating and Drinking*, i. e. doing the common Actions of other men; and therefore he never disdained to keep company with any, even the meanest and most despicable sinner; his retinue consisting for the most part of those the *Jews* called, *Ασφαδς*, i. sinners in an eminent and notorious manner; whom as a *Physician* he not only cured; but as a *mercifull Priest* sought out to save. Yet when his *Christian Liberty* came once to be invaded, he layed aside his gentleness, and proved a stiff and peremptory Assertour of it. To omit many passages, of which his Story is full, I shall mention but one, and that was his refusing to wash his hands before *Mar. 15.* meat. This was not onely a thing in it self indifferent, but likewise had some Argument from Decency to induce, and a constant Tradition from the *Elders* or *Sanhedrim* to enforce it, who at this time were not onely their *Ecclesiastical*, but their *Civil Rulers*: Yet all these Motives, in a thing so innocent and small as that was, would not prevail with our Saviour to quit his Liberty of eating with *unwashed hands*. And in defence of himself, he calls them *superstitious fools*, and *blind guides*, who were offended at him; and leaves two unanswerable Arguments, which are of equal validity in things of the like nature. As

1. *That this was not a Plant, of his Fathers planting, and therefore it should be rooted up*; whereby our Saviour intimates, that as the *Pharisees* had no divine warrant to prescribe such a Toy as that was, so God would at last declare his Indignation against their *Supererogatory Worship*, by pulling it up *Root and Branch*. From whence I gather this Rule, That when once *Humane Inventions* become *Impositions*, and lay a Necessity upon that, which God hath left Free; then may we lawfully reject them, as *Plants of mans setting*, and not of *Gods owning*.

2. The second Argument our Saviour uses is, *That these things did not defile a man*, i. e. as to his mind and conscience. To eat with *unwashed hands* was at the worst, but a point of ill manners, and unhandſome perhaps or indecent, but not an impious or ungodly thing; and therefore more likely to offend nice stomachs, than scrupulous consciences. Whole satisfaction in such things as these our Saviour did not at all study. From whence I inferre,

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Mat. 23. 26

That in the worship of God we are chiefly to look after the *Substance* of things; and as for *Circumstances*, they are either not worth our Notice, or else will be Answerable to our Inward Impressions; according to which our Saviour in another place, sayes, *O blinde Pharisee, cleanse first the Inside of the Cup, and of the Plaster, that so the outside may be clean*; hereby implying, that a *Renewed Heart*, will be sure to make a *changed and seemly behaviour*; whereas the most specious outside is consistent with Inward Filth and Rottenesse. So that they who presse *outward conformity* in *Divine Worship*, endeavour to serve God the wrong way, and often times do only force Carnal and Hypocritical men to present God a Sacrifice which he abhorres; while to others that are more Tender and Scrupulous, they make the Sacrifice it self unpleasant, because they will not let it be, what God would have it, a *Free-will-offering*.

Act. 15.

2. My second Instance shall be the *Resolution* of the Apostles in that Famous and Important Quere, concerning the *Jewish Ceremonies*, whether they were to be imposed or not; after a long dispute to finde out the Truth (*καὶ οὐκ ὁμοθυμαδὸν γινόμενος*, sayes the Text) Peter directly opposes those Rites; Why, sayes he, *doe ye tempt God, by putting a Yoke upon the Neck of the Disciples*. Imprimating that to put a Yoke upon others (and to impose in things indifferent is certainly a great one) from which, God hath either expressly freed us, by commanding the contrary: or else tacitly freed us, by not commanding them: This is nothing else but to *Tempt God*, and to pretend to be more Wise and Holy than he. Again, James decries those *Ceremonies*, upon this score, least they should (*παρανομήσιν*) be troublesome to the converted Gentiles; implying, that however men may think it a small matter, to impose an *Indifferent* thing, yet indeed it is, an infinite Trouble and matter of Disquiet to the Party imposed upon, because he is thereby disabled from using his *Liberty*, in that which he knows to be *Indifferent*.

Upon the hearing of these two, the Result of the whole Councel was, that the *Brethren* should not be imposed upon, although the Arguments for conformity were much stronger then, then now they can be; because the *Jews* in all probability, might thereby have been the sooner wonne over to the Christian Perswasion. The Decree which that *Apostolical*, and truly Christian Synod makes is very observable,

1. From



1. From the *Stile* they use, *It seems good* (say they) *to the holy Ghost, and to us*,—so that who ever exercises the same *imposing power*, had need be sure he hath the same *Divine Authority*; for fear he onely rashly assumes what was never granted him.

2. From the things they Impose, *It seems good, &c.* (say they) *to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That you abstain from things offered to Idols, from Blood, from things strangled, and from Fornication.* Whence I observe,

1. That they call their Imposition *βάρος*, a weight, or burden; which is not unnecessarily to be layed on the shoulders of any.

2. They say, they forbid onely *τὰ ἐνάγκης τὰυτα*—*These very Necessary things*, to show, that *Necessary* things onely, and not *Indifferent*, should be the matter of our Imposition.

For whereas some gather from hence, that the *Church*, i. where a State is Christian, the *Christian Magistrate*, hath a power to oblige men to the doing of things he commands, though in their own Nature they be indifferent; because they suppose that the Apostles did so, as for example, in forbidding to eat *Blood*, therefore consider,

1. That this is quite contrary to the Apostles scope, whose business was to Ease and Free, and not to Tie up their Brethren; and therefore they say, they meerly do lay upon them *things very necessary*.

2. That all those things they forbid, were not *Indifferent*, but long before prohibited by God, not only in the *Ceremonial*, but in his *Positive Law*, and therefore obligatory, whereupon the Apostles call them *Necessary*, i. things necessary to be forborn, even before they had made any Decree against them. As

1. *Εἰδωλόθυτα*, i. *The meat of things offered to Idols*: To eat of them was not in all cases indifferent; for to do it with conscience of the Idol, i. intending thereby to worship the Idol, this was a thing against the second Commandment. But if a man was convinced that the Idol was nothing, and therefore the meat, though consecrated, was Free to him: Yet if his weaker Brother was offended; he was then to abstain in observance of Christian Charity and Condescension: But if the Eater himself did doubt, then was he to forbear for his own peace and quiet's sake, for to eat,  
while

while he was unsatisfied whether it was lawfull or not, was nothing else but to condemn himself, as the Apostle sayes, *He that doubts, is* (not damned, as we render it, but κατακρίνεται—) *condemned, i. Self-condemn'd if he eat*, because he doth that which he inwardly doth either not approve, or else at least suspects, that it is not lawfull: so that the Case of eating *εὐδαίμονα*, being so nice, and so apt to be mistaken: the Apostles do make their Prohibition Universal, as that which was most safe, and least subject to scruple.

2. *ἄψυχα* and *πνικτά*, *Blood*; i.e. *Flesh with the blood*; or, as some, *Raw flesh*; and *Things strangled*; to eat these was not indifferent, but prohibited long before by God, in his Law given to *Noah*. And therefore the Apostles Prohibition here, is not to be interpreted, as their giving a Temporary Law, with respect had to the then Constitution and æconomy of the *Jews* (as some weakly and without ground from Scripture, imagine) but rather as a Reviving and Reenforcing an old Law, which being given by God to *Noah*, both then was, and still is Obligatory to all his Posterity, God having no where dispensed with it.

3. Lastly, *Πορνεία*, if you render it *Fornication*, then it is evidently contrary to those Precepts of Purity, Holiness and Perfection, which God every where requires. But if you expound it, as many learned men do, *Unlawfull Copulations*; then the Prohibition enforces upon us the observance of those Laws concerning *Marriage*, which are recorded in *Levit. 18.* and which is evident, are not in their own Nature indifferent, since marrying with our *Mother, Sister, or Daughter*, the Heathen *Plato*, and the *Grecian* Laws condemned even by the light of Nature. And God, there in that Chapter, calls the contrary Practices, *Abominable Customs*; for which he threatens to root even the Heathen out,—*v. 27. ad fin.*

From what has been said out of this Instance, I conclude, That since, 1. The Apostles, though divinely inspired, yet did not impose any *Rites* upon the *Church*, by their own proper Power, but joyn themselves with the *Holy Ghost*, as being Act'd and Commissioned by him. Since, 2. They use no Arguments from Decency to justify their Imposition, nor lay any Unnecessary Burden upon any, by forbidding or enjoining things purely *Indifferent*, but onely prohibit such things, as they call, and it is clear from  
what



what has been said, that they were *Necessary*. And lastly, since the Retaining some of the more Innocent and lesse Burdensome *Ceremonies* of the *Jews*, in point of Order and Convenience only, would in all probability have been the readiest means to bring that Precise and Superstitious People unto a Compliance with the Gospel; and without doubt for that reason would have been enjoyned had the Apostles conceived they had any power to have medled with them. Hence I conclude for Persons, 1. Who have no such Authority. 2. In things much more indifferent. And lastly, Where the Necessity of conforming is nothing neer so pressing and urgent. For such, I say, to take upon themselves an *Arbitrary* and an *Imposing Power*, it is altogether *Unwarrantable*, and consequently *sinfull*.

3. My last instance shall be that of the Apostle *Paul*, who was of an Universally Complying carriage; he sayes of himself, *That he became all things to all men, even to Jews as a Jew*, &c. with many more words to the same purpose. And to shew his *Liberty*, he circumcised *Timothy*, though a *Greeke*, *that he might gain the Jews in those parts*. But when once a Sect of men rose up, who began to preach the *Necessity* of *Circumcision*, he doth in many places sharply inveigh against them, calling them *doggs*, *evil workers*, and in derision, *εὐσεβῆς*, or the *Concision*; and concludes his Epistle to the *Galatians*, with bidding them to beware of such, as laboured to *boast in their flesh*, i. sought to bring them unto a *Conformity* in those outward *Ordinances*. Nay so jealous and precisely carefull was that Apostle of this great Christian *Priviledge* and *Charter*, viz. *Freedom in Indifferent things*; that he could not brook so much as *Peter's* suspicious carriage in that particular, but for his *Disimulation*, and pretending to be lesse Free, than he was, *Paul* sayes, *That he openly reprov'd him to his Face*. And for other *False Brethren*, who crept into their Assemblies, meerly to *spie out their liberty*, and without doubt, used the same Arguments for *Conformity*, which many do now; the Apostle sayes, *He resisted them, and yeelded not to them so much as for a moment*; And that he might for ever preserve his *Galatians* from being ensnared, and brought under bondage again, he leaves them the *Caveat*, I mentioned before, *Stand fast in your liberty*, &c. From whence I inferre, that so long as a thing is left *Indifferent*, though there be some suspicion of *Superstition* in it, we may lawfully practise it, as *Paul* did *Circumcision*: But when any shall take upon

1 Cor. 9.  
19, 23.

Act. 16.

Gal. 2.

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them to make it *Necessary*, then the thing so imposed presently loses not its *Liberty* only, but likewise its *Lawfulness*; and we may not, without Breach of the Apostles Precept, submit unto it: because we thereby do own, that those whose injunctions we obey, had a power to impose; and so, by assenting, we become abettors and promoters of their *Usurpation*.

4. My last Argument against *Impositions*, shall be taken from the *Inconveniences* that attend such a practise. For though I lay little stress upon such kind of Arguments (because *Truth* is to be tried by its *Evidence*, and not by its *Consequences*) yet because, 1. In *Principles*, on which *moral Actions* are grounded, the *Inconveniences*, do use to be weighed, and that Doctrine for the most part seems most True, at least most Plausible, which is attended by fewest *Inconveniences*: and because, 2. The Opposers of *Liberty*, have very little else to urge for themselves, but by pretending the many inconveniences that flow from it. Therefore I shall clearly prove that many more *Absurd*, and more *Destructive* and *Fatal Consequences* attend the Doctrine of *Impositions*, then the Doctrine of *Christian Liberty*. As

1. The first *Inconvenience* is, the Impossibility to fix a point where the *Imposer* will stop. For do but once grant, That the *Magistrate* hath power to impose, and then we lie at his mercy, how farre he will go. For the *Marriage of Ministers*, *holy Unction*, *Consecrating the Host*, &c. are as indifferent in their own nature, as Using the *Crosse*, or *Surplice*. And if the Magistrate hath indeed lawfull power to Impose, he may as well Command those, as these: especially if he be convinced that they are either *Decent* or *Convenient*; at which door have entred in all those *grosse Fooleries*, which are in the *Popish* worship: any of which, take them singly, and apart from the Circumstances which determine them, so they are *Indifferent*, and may, for ought I know, be conscientiously observed. But put them together, and consider the Power which Imposes, and the End which continues them; so they are the *grossest Idolatry*, and the *vilest Tyranny* that ever yet was practised. For we are for the most part mistaken in the Notion of *Poperie*, if we see a *Surplice*, or a *Crosse*, or *Organs*, or *Bowing*, we presently cry out *Poperie*; whereas I think it a more manifest sign of *Poperie*, to forbid these things, as we do, under *Penalties*, than to practise them with *Freedome*. If I understand any thing of *Antichrist*, his Nature seems to me to consist in this, That he Acts in a way contrary to

*Christ.*

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Christ, i. e. in stead of a *spiritual*, he brings in a *Devised Worship*; and instead of *Freedom*, layes a *Constraint* even upon our *Devotion*. So that, as *John* in his *Revelation* sayes of him, *Men shall neither buy, nor sell, who have not his mark, i. who do not serve God in that outward way, which he commands*. So that whoever doth own the *Doctrine of Imposition*, though in the smallest circumstance of *Worship*, he brings in the *Essence*, though not the *Name of Popery*; and layes down that for his *Foundation*, on which all the *Will-worship*, which this day reigns in the world, is bortomed. For whatever opinions we have concerning the *Necessity of Bowing, Kneeling, or the like*, while they stand confined to our private practises, they are at worst but *Hay and stubble*, which will perish at the *day of account*, though he that doth them 2 Cor. 3. may very well be saved. But when once a man goes further, and not content with his *Perswasions*, envies his Brother that *Liberty*, which he himself desires to enjoy; and seeks to obtrude his *Condeits* upon others, who perhaps are not so well satisfied as he is: Whoever doth this, becomes *Impious to God*, by invading his *Sovereignty*, and lording it over another mans *Conscience*; and likewise *Injurious to men*, by pressing such things, as are onely *Baits to the Carelesse*, and *Traps for the Conscientious*. I know very well, that the *Argument* is specious, and often urged—*Why should men be so scrupulous?* most pleading for *Ceremonies*, as *Lot* did for *Zoar*, *Are not they little things?* But I answer, 1. That a little thing unwarrantably done is a great sin. 2. That a little thing unjustly gained, makes way for a greater: and therefore we should not let the *Serpent* get in his *Head*, how beautifull so ever it seems, least he brings in his *Tail*, and with that his *sting*.—How curious even almost to *Superstition*, our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, especially *Paul*, were, I have already mentioned; by whose *Example* we are little profited, if we do not learn, that in *Impositions* we are not so much to consider how small and inconsiderable the thing imposed is, as how lawfull it is: Not, what it is in it self, as whether it tends, and what will be the *Consequence* of its *Admission*. For the smaller the thing imposed is, the more is our *Christian Liberty* invaded, and consequently the more injurious and sinfull is its *imposition*.

2. The second *Inconvenience* is, that it quite inverts the *Nature of Christian Religion*; not only by taking away its *Freedom*, but

## Concerning Things Indifferent

likewise its *Spirituality*, our Saviour sayes, that God will now be worshipped not in shew, and Ceremony, but in *spirit*, and in *truth*; whereas this *Doctrine of Impositions*, places it in such things, in the observance of which, *Superstition* will be sure to out-do *Devotion*. But *true Religion*, like the spirits of wine or subtile essences, when ever it comes to be Opened and Exposed to view, runs the hazard of being presently dispirited and lost. in the service of God there is a vast difference, between *Purity* and *Pomp*, between *spirit* and *splendour*; whereas the Imposer only drives at and improves the later; but of the former is altogether secure and carelesse, as is evident in those places, where *Uniformity* is most strictly practised.

3. Thirdly, This Doctrine making no provision at all for such as are *scrupulous* and *tender*, supposes the same *measure of Faith* in all, whereas nothing is more clear than, as the Apostle sayes concerning *Things offered to Idols*, so concerning *Ceremonies*, I may say, that *All have not knowledg*. But to this day many there are utterly unsatisfied with the *Lawfulness* of any, and most are convinced of the *Uselesness* of them all. Whole Consciences, how erroneous so ever, yet are to be Tenderly and Gently dealt with; least by our Rigid Commanding what they can by no means comply with, we bring them unto that Dangerous *Dilemma*, either of breaking their Inward Peace and Comfort, by doing outwardly what they do not inwardly approve of: or else of running themselves upon the Rocks of Poverty and Prejudice, by disobeying what is commanded. For though we are upon all occasions to suffer gladly, yet let not *Reuben smite Ephraim*; let us not receive our wounds in the house of our Friends; for then our sufferings will be sharpened from the consideration of the Unkindness; that our Brethren should put us upon the Trial of our *Faith* and *Patience*, especially in such things, which while the Imposer calls Indifferent, he thereby acknowledges, that they may very well be spared.

4. The last Inconvenience is, that by *Impositions*, especially when the *Penalty* is severe, we seem to lay as much weight and stress upon these *Indifferent* things, as upon any the most materiall parts of our Religion. This Rigid Irrespective obtruding of small things, makes no difference at all between *Ceremony* and *Substance*. So that a man who were not a *Christian* at all, would find as good, nay perhaps better usage from the Imposer; then he who labouring and endeavoring



endeavouring to live up to other parts of Christian Faith, shall yet forbear to practice these *Ceremonies*: Which is not only Harsh and Cruel, but very Incongruous dealing, that a *Jew* or *Mahumedan*, shall be better regarded than a *weak and scrupulous Christian*. This is nothing else but to deal with *Christians* as *Jephtha* did with the *Ephraimites*, to kill them for no weightier crime, than because they cannot pronounce *Shibboleth*.

To these *Inconveniences* I might adde the certain decay of the growth of Religion as to its inward Purity, while there is this Disguise and Maske of needless Ceremonies upon it to keep it under; but those which I have already urged, are so great, that those which are commonly insisted upon by men of another Perswasion, are not at all to be put into the Balance with them: as will appear by this brief Answer, to their main Objections.

1. They object that this will be the way to beget all manner of *Disorder* and *Confusion*; that every man will have a severall Fashion and Custome by himself; and for want of *Uniformity* and *Ceremony*, the unity and essence of Religion will perish. But I answer.

1. *Doth any plead for Baal?* He that will abuse the Principle of *Liberty*, to justify his *Licentiousness of Life*, let him know that the *Magistrate* bears not the *Sword* in vain, but has it to cut off such offenders. *If you suffer as Christians*, saith the Apostle, *rejoyce at it*; 2 Pet. 14. *But let none suffer, as a Thief, Murderer, Raxomites, i. a seditious person or State Incendiary*, or, as a *busy intermeddler in other mens matters*: for he that doth these things suffers justly, nor can he plead any thing from the *Gospel*, which is a Rule of strictness, to exempt him from Punishment. But

2. This *Disorder*, which is so vehemently and so Tragically aggravated, and for the prevention of which *Ceremonies*, must be invented and forced, is indeed nothing else but a Malicious and Ill sounding name, put upon an excellent & most comely thing, i. e. *variety*. For as God, though he be a *God of Order*, hath not made all men of one countenance, and in the world hath given severall and divers *shapes* to many things which yet are the same for *substance*; so in the Assemblies of his People, who all come to Honour him, and agree in the Essence of his Worship, why should we doubt but God will be well pleased with their variety in Circumstances; the exercise of which not only their Consciences do prompt, but God himself doth

doth induce them to, because in his Word he hath not prescribed any one *Outward Forme*, that all should necessarily agree in; but in such things hath left them to the Dictates of their own Spirits, and the guidance of Christian prudence; which *Variety* is so farre from being a *Confusion*, that nothing can be more Comely and Harmonious, as serving to set out the Indulgence of God, the different Actings of the Holy Spirit, and the *Liberty of the Saints*, who preserve *Unity* in mind, without *Uniformity* in Behaviour.

2. The second Objection is the practice of the *Jewish Princes*, who as soon as ever they were enstalled in their Kingdomes, set upon *re-forming* the *House of God*, and imposing upon all a *Form of Worship*: which since all *Scripture is Written by Divine Inspiration*, and for our  
Rom. 16. *Instruction*, seems to be a leading case that *Christian Princes* should imitate them, and do so likewise. But I answer.

1. Though Arguments taken from *Analogy* are of very little weight, when Positive Precepts are required, yet I will grant, that the Piety of the *Jewish*, is, and ought to be exemplary to the *Christian Magistrates*, --- but withall I deny the Inference, since the *Jewish Princes*, when they Reformed *Religion*, they therein followed a *Divine Law*, which did command it from them, and which, in the minutest circumstances, had provided for *uniformity of Worship*: from which Rigor and Restraint all Christians are absolved, and therefore it is very unconcluding to Argue from the *Jews*, who had; to the *Christian Magistrate*, who wants *Divine Authority*. To this is also Objected.

3. That since things *Necessary* to the worship of God, be already determined by God, and over them the *Magistrate* has no power; if likewise he should have no Power in *Indifferent Things*, then it would follow, that in things appertaining to Religion, the *Christian Magistrate* had no power at all --- which they think to be very Absurd --- so the Reverend and Learned Mr *Hooker*, and Dr *Sander-son*. But I answer.

1. That it is no Absurdity at all, that Princes should have no more power in ordering the things of God, than God himself hath allowed them. And if God hath no where given them such an Imposing Power, they must be content to go without it. But in this case, where will the *Christian Magistrate* find his Warrant, the Scriptures being utterly silent, that he is now to take such Authority upon him, which, because the thing concerns not man, but the  
Worship



Worship of God, had it been thought necessary and Fit, would certainly not have been omitted.

2. It is so farre from being an Argument for *Impositions*, to urge that the thing Imposed is *Indifferent*, that there cannot be a stronger Argument against them : since it is as requisite to Christian Practice, that *Things Indifferent*, should full be kept *Indifferent*, as *Things Necessary*, be held *Necessary*, -- As I have already proved.

Lastly, It is much more suited to the Nature of the *Gospel*, that *Christian Princes* should reforme Religion, rather by the example of their Life, than by the severity of their Laws; and if they may show their power at all in this case, it should rather be by *Substrating*, then by *Adding*. --- By taking away all importinences, which may hinder the Progress of it, rather than by obtruding unwarrantable Methods, to tie all men up to such Outward Formes; as may make Piety suspected only for Policy disguised.

Much more might be said for this from *Authority*, but I willingly wave it. For if *Scripture* and *Reason* will not prevaile to hinder *Impositions*, I have no cause to expect that any sentences from Antiquity should. --- Only this is certain, that all the Writings of the Christians for the first three hundred years, are full of nothing else but such Arguments as evince a *Liberty*, more Absolute and Universal than I contend for. And likewise it may be of some weight, that the *Churches Doctrine* was then more pure, their *Discipline* more strict and severe than now; and yet they had nothing but *Mutual Consent*, either to Establish or Protect it. The Magistrates being all against them. --- But when once *Constantine* took upon him to manage the Affairs of the *Church*, and by *Penall Laws*, ratified and confirmed *Church Orders*. --- He laid that foundation of *Anti-Christian Tyranny*, which presently after him, his Son *Constantius* exercised against the Assertors of the *Trinity* : and, the Churches worldly power encreasing as fast, as the purity of Religion did decrease; the *Bishops of Rome* within a few years, gained to themselves, and have ever since practised severely against such, whom they call *Heretiks*, i. Deniers of their Factions Doctrine; and opposers of their most Ungospel-like, but indeed most Politick and Prudentiall Impositions.

Whose furious and bloody Tenets have, like subtile Poison, run through the Veines of almost all Professors; scarce any sort even  
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of protestants, allowing to others that *Liberty of Religion*; which at the beginning of their Sects, they justly challenged to themselves. Nor is there any Hope, that the world should be freed from Cruelty, disguised under the name of zeal, till it pleased God to informe all *Magistrates*, how far their Commission reaches, that their proper Province is only over the Body, to repress and correct those morall vices, to which our *Outward* man is subject: But as for Christian Religion, since it is so *Pure and Simple*, so free from *State and worldly magnificence*, so *Gentle and Complying* with the meanest Christian, and withall so remote from *Harshness, Rigour, and Severity*; there the *Magistrate* most consults Gods honour and his own duty, it being strict to himself, he leaves all others in these *Outward Ceremonies*, to their Inward Convictions. Which *Liberty*, is so farre from weakning, that it is indeed the security of a Throne; since besides gaining the Peoples Love (especially the most Conscientious and sober of them) it doth in a speciall manner entitle him to Gods Protection: Since in not pretending to be wiser then God, he gives Religion the free and Undisturbed Passage, which our Saviour seems by his Life and Death to have opened for it.

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**FINIS.**

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